

All About OATS



Oat, (*Avena sativa*) is one of the major cereal grains produced worldwide. Oats are grown for both human and animal consumption. While oats have a bland, slightly earthy taste they also have a great ability to absorb the flavor of other ingredients. They are annual plants and often reach five feet in height. The flowering and fruiting structure, or inflorescence, of the plant is made up of numerous branches bearing florets that produce one-seeded fruit. People often eat the plant's whole seeds (oats), outer seed layers (oat bran), and leaves and stems (oat straw).

Oats have been cultivated for thousands of years and are thought to have originated as weeds that grew within cultivated fields of various other crops. Greeks and Romans considered oats to be nothing more than a diseased version of wheat and only fit for animal consumption. Even by the 1850s, many Americans only considered oats to be food for livestock. Ferdinand Schumacher set out to change that perception in 1856 when he opened the German Mills American Oatmeal Factory in Akron, Ohio. Schumacher found success due to both the cheap nature of oat milling as well as strong support from Irish and German immigrants, who were already more accustomed to eating oats. Today, oats are an important crop in all temperate regions of the world.

Interesting Facts

- Oats are grown to some extent in every continental state. However, the production of oats is led by Russia and Canada, each having about twenty percent of the world's total.
- Less than five percent of the oats now grown commercially are for human consumption. Oats are also commonly used as feed for horses and cattle.
- Oat straw is prized by cattle and horse producers as bedding, due to its soft, relatively dust-free, and absorbent nature.
- Pure oats are gluten-free but most commercial brands are processed in facilities that also produce gluten-containing wheat, rye, and barley.

Health Ingredient Contribution

One serving of common oats can provide over sixty percent of your daily value of dietary fiber. The Food and Drug Administration allows the use of a health claim on food labels associating a reduced risk of coronary heart disease with the consumption of beta-glucan soluble fiber from whole grain oats. Soluble fiber also slows the absorption of glucose into the body, which means you're going to avoid those nasty sugar highs and lows.

Oatmeal is also a desired asset to those trying to lose weight and control hunger levels due to its high water and soluble fiber content.

Oat extracts can also be used to soothe skin conditions and is a popular ingredient in cosmetics.

Culinary Uses

Oats are often used to add texture in different baked goods such as muffins, cookies, soda bread, scones, granola and pancakes.

Oat flour are oats that have been ground to a flour-like consistency. Oat flour can be used to make bread and other baked goods, but keep in mind that oat flour lacks gluten, a crucial component that adds structure, moisture, and volume and is best used in flat breads like pita. A quarter of the wheat flour in a recipe can be substituted with oat flour to add chewiness and a boost of nutrients.

Muesli is a cold oatmeal dish based on rolled oats and ingredients such as grains, nuts, seeds and fresh or dried fruits. Muesli was traditionally prepared with milk or cream, a squeeze of citrus juice, often with a sweetener such as honey, and either left overnight to soften or eaten immediately.

Porridge is a hot cereal dish, made by boiling ground, crushed or chopped grains in milk. Oat porridge, or oatmeal, is one of the most common types of porridge.

Oat milk is a popular vegan and dairy alternative, obtained by soaking oat grains in water.